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AUTHOR Newmann, Fred M.
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ABSTRACT

This document focuses on the challenge of building professional community within schools. The introductory article provides a definition of and rationale for "community within schools." The second article discusses some of the benefits that schools enjoy when they develop strong professional communities, and what conditions and resources make the development of those communities possible. The article examines teacher surveys from 15 restructuring schools to identify factors that affect the development of professional community--5 critical elements of teacher interaction, 5 structural conditions, and 5 social/human resources. Findings suggest that human resources--such as openness to improvement, trust and respect, knowledge and skills, supportive leadership, and socialization--are more critical to the development of professional community than are structural conditions. The third article provides profiles of one elementary, one middle, and one high school that have strong professional communities. Data were derived from observations, surveys, and interviews. Southern Elementary School, which implemented an Accelerated Schools model, was characterized by school-based decision-making, staff-led innovations, and reflection and inquiry. Northwest Middle School established a "choice system" for students and teachers; however, teachers had divergent ideas about curriculum and instruction. Western High School utilized heterogenous student grouping and multicultural education, formal mechanisms to encourage collaboration, and shared decision-making. Some teachers, however, identified time constraints and the rigid format of committee meetings as drawbacks. (LMI)

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ED 370 214

Issues in restructuring schools

School-wide Professional Community

By Fred M. Newmann

"It takes a whole village to raise a child." The much-quoted African proverb says it can't be done by an individual teacher, or even by several teachers working independently. Instead, it requires communal effort of many adults, in a variety of roles, who share a unified common purpose, and who help one another to teach and socialize their youth.

School restructuring can enhance this sense of community, both within schools and by restoring connections between schools and their communities. This report focuses on the challenge of building professional community within schools.

DEFINITION AND RATIONALE

What does community mean within U.S. schools, and why is it important? The broad concept can be summarized as school staff members taking collective responsibility for achieving a shared educational purpose, and collaborating with one another to achieve that purpose.

Community within schools seems necessary for effective student learning for at least three reasons.

First, students need clear and consistent messages about the objectives and methods of learning. If teachers communicate only vague expectations, or if they work at cross purposes, students' efforts to learn will be less productive, due to lack of direction and coordination.

Second, academic learning is hard work, and school competes for students' attention with many other activities and concerns: peer and family issues; jobs; caring for others; extracurricular activities; and the popular culture's preoccupation with videos, the latest tapes and CDs, cars, clothes and other commercial trappings. If teachers simply leave it up to students to choose whether or not to learn, many students will be left behind. Instead, teachers must take active responsibility for student success. And since any single teacher's influence on a student is affected by the actions of other staff, each teacher's responsibility to the student must extend beyond his or her classroom to the productivity of the school organization as a whole.

Finally, effective teaching is complicated and difficult. It usually requires information, expertise and support far beyond the resources available to the individual teacher working alone in an isolated classroom. Teachers who collaborate with their colleagues are more likely to be effective with students, because they will benefit from expanded resources.

This kind of reasoning demonstrates the value of clear, shared purpose, collective responsibility and collaboration within schools. But what does empirical evidence say about the actual benefits of school community to students? The Center is exploring this

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ISSUE REPORT NO. 6
SPRING 1994

Building Professional Community in Schools 3
Southern Elementary School–A Unifying Vision Bears Fruit 7
Northwest Middle School–The Power of Choice 10
Western High School–Meeting the Challenge of Diversity 14

EA 025 849

Teachers who collaborate with their colleagues are more likely to be effective with students, because they will benefit from expanded resources.

Fred M. Newmann is director of the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools and a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

connection in 24 restructured elementary, middle and high schools nationwide. Findings should be available in the fall of 1995. But data from other recent studies suggest that a sense of community in high schools has positive effects on both student engagement and achievement.[1]

Despite its apparent value, professional community within schools is hard to achieve. School organization and culture in U.S. schools present formidable obstacles to the development of clear, shared purpose, collective responsibility and collaboration.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

School-wide consensus on clear and focused educational goals eludes many schools. For one thing, staff members–and parents as well–can find themselves divided by differences between traditional and progressive educational philosophies. Also, academic specialization tends to compartmentalize teaching into such different subjects that common threads are hard to find. And by trying to respond to the diverse needs, abilities and interests of students, schools create distinct programs that are often unconnected by specific common goals. Escalating diversity in the student population continues to magnify this issue.

Instead of resolving conflicts among competing interests and narrowing the range of educational goals, schools often find it more convenient to adopt goals stated as general slogans. Thus we find schools vowing to guide students toward "learning to learn," or "responsible citizenship," or "productive careers." The slogans give an illusion of shared purpose, but permit tremendous differences in educational focus between teachers and programs.

To build cultures of collective responsibility for student learning, educators must overcome a common tendency to attribute students' difficulties largely to conditions beyond the school–especially the family, peers, and neighborhood. While these influences are real, teachers in a strong school community feel significant individual responsibility to maximize student success, regardless of student social background.

Individual teacher responsibility becomes easier to assume if fortified by collective responsibility; that is, by a sense of responsibility not only for one's own actions and students, but also for the actions of colleagues and other students in the school. The assurance that one's colleagues share responsibility for all students helps to sustain each teacher's commitment.

But at least three barriers can stand in the way of teachers working actively with one another for the success of all students. First, according to professional norms, most teachers want to be treated as autonomous professionals, and are thereby reluctant to become involved with their colleagues' teaching and students. Second, there are few organizational mechanisms that help teachers to carefully examine the success of all students and to discuss problems and possible remedies. Finally, differences in formal and informal power within a staff can interfere with the process of reaching consensus on staff responsibilities for high expectations, both for students and for one another.

Collaboration is perhaps the least difficult of the three broad features of school community to achieve. Teachers value both giving and receiving help in conducting their work. Still, it is often difficult to find enough time for teachers to work together. Specialization of academic subjects and other school services (such as counseling, special education and bilingual instruction) can create additional roadblocks to productive collaboration.

In the material to follow we offer a conception of professional community that extends the general conception of school community. We also present examples of how some restructured schools have progressed in achieving professional community, along with details of the obstacles and challenges that remain.

[1]Most of the evidence comes from studies of high schools, because useful national databases exist only at this level (Bryk & Driscoll,1988; Bryk, Lee & Holland,1993; Lee & Smith, in progress).

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Building Professional Community in Schools

By Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk

In order for students and teachers to benefit from empowerment, a professional community must develop among teachers, one committed to fundamental change in teaching practices.

The current school reform movement includes a strong emphasis on the "professionalization" of teachers' work. Commonly stated themes include the creation of more stringent standards of entry into the teaching field, developing a national licensing system for more advanced teachers, and boosting pay and training opportunities in order to attract and retain skilled, committed practitioners.

While these reforms may be critical, researchers and education reformers shouldn't focus solely on strategies for the development of individual professionals. Teaching, after all, does not begin and end in the classroom. At a minimum, a teacher's experiences with other faculty members, as well as with the school's leaders and organizational structure, will cause smiles or frustration. At maximum, these interactions can have a profound effect on the impact that a teacher has on his or her students.

Researchers and reformers can't afford to overlook the impact of decisions and actions that teachers, working together in some type of sustained professional contact, take to improve school performance. This collective reflection, development of standards and expectations and formulation of plans for action are major hallmarks of a well-developed professional community. In schools where professional community is strong, teachers enjoy much greater support from their colleagues. Research suggests they feel more effective at their jobs.

Many leading scholars believe that the school must be the focus of change if education is to improve. We agree. Our study of this topic, therefore, centers on the type of professional community that is firmly imbedded in the school community–as opposed to communities fostered by professional networks and other organizations beyond the school–and which uses the school's involvement in reform as the basis for teacher commitment and interaction.

This article discusses some of the benefits that schools enjoy when they develop strong professional communities, and what conditions and resources make the development of those communities possible. Based on data collected from schools studied by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, we examine which resources and conditions seem to be most critical to sparking and sustaining such development.

EMPOWERMENT AND BEYOND

The development of professional community in a particular school, or the lack of it, can have implications for other reform efforts. We have seen, for example, that merely granting teachers greater responsibility for decisions that affect their jobs, such as school policy and curriculum, doesn't guarantee that instruction will improve. Study of schools where these powers have been enhanced suggest that these new responsibilities, by themselves, don't always translate into an increased focus on teacher professional competence. Teachers may resist performing the extra administrative work that empowerment efforts bring. Or they may resist involvement in their school's decision making process because their visions of professional conduct don't include an emphasis on issues of power and control. In such cases, the mechanisms put in place to empower teachers can end up augmenting a principal's control of the school instead, or the mechanisms fail to focus on essential issues that affect classroom work.

This doesn't mean that teacher empowerment is not important. It means that in many settings, it is not enough. In order for students and teachers to benefit from empowerment, a professional community must develop among teachers, one committed to fun-

There must be support within the school for teachers who want to take risks and try new techniques and ideas. Otherwise, serious and lasting change cannot be sustained.

damental change in teaching practices.

A school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints and other obstacles they commonly encounter in today's schools. Within a strong professional community, for example, teachers can work collectively to set and enforce standards of instruction and learning. Instead of obeying bureaucratic rules, faculty members act according to teachers' norms of professional behavior and duty, which have been shown to be far stronger social control mechanisms. This also creates room within the school structure for principled disagreement and discussion on different issues, which can add to teachers' professional growth.

In schools where professional community is strong, teachers work together more effectively, and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

Professional communities are strong when the teachers in a school demonstrate five critical elements:

1 **Reflective Dialogue.** Members of the community talk about their situations and the specific challenges they face. Together, they develop a set of shared norms, beliefs and values that form a basis for action. Members of the community can use these discussions to critique themselves, as well as the institution within which they work.

These critiques can take several different directions: They can focus on subject matter and how to present it to students, for example, on generic teaching strategies, on student learning and development, on the social conditions of schooling, and issues of equity and justice.

2 **De-Privatization of Practice.** Teachers share, observe and discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies; for example, through peer coaching. By sharing practice "in public," teachers learn new ways to talk about what they do, and the discussions kindle new relationships between the participants.

3 **Collective Focus on Student Learning.** Teachers are focused on student learning. They assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels, and that teachers can help them, despite many obstacles that students may face outside of school. Within a strong professional community, this focus is not enforced by rules, but by mutually felt obligation among teachers.

4 **Collaboration.** A strong professional community encourages teachers to work together, not only to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum and instructional policy, but also to produce materials and activities that improve instruction, curriculum and assessment for students, and to produce new and different approaches to staff development for the teachers themselves.

5 **Shared Norms and Values.** Through their words and actions, teachers joined in a professional community affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues, and in support of their collective focus on student learning. These values can address children and their ability to learn, priorities for the use of time and space within a school setting, and the proper roles of parents, teachers and administrators.

For example, teachers might require students who are failing to take part in after-school study sessions. They devise a school policy for dealing with the added burdens these sessions entail. This would show that teachers value student achievement, and that they are willing to take responsibility for giving extra help to students who are failing.

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

Several conditions must be met in order for a professional community to develop and grow within a school. These can be grouped in two categories: structural conditions and human or social resources.

The necessary structural conditions include:

✓ **Time to Meet and Talk**–This is essential to beginning and maintaining meaningful education reform within a school. There must be a formal process that provides sub-

stantial and regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct an ongoing self-examination and self-renewal.

It's not enough for a school's leadership to simply tack another period onto the end of a workday that is already long and tiring. Such periods must be built into the school's schedule and calendar in a way that gives teachers opportunities to consider critical issues in a reflective manner.

There should be almost daily opportunities for discussion among small groups with common interests, such as academic departments or grade levels, as well as regular meetings among the entire faculty.

✓ **Physical Proximity**–Physical isolation can be a real barrier to collaboration among teachers, especially in larger schools. Schools can increase teacher contact by creating team planning rooms or other common places for discussion of educational practices.

In schools where classrooms are close together and "open door" policies are supported, teachers find it easier to work together, and to gain new insight into their own practices. In such settings, it's much easier for teachers to continually observe each other and discuss what they see.

✓ **Interdependent Teaching Roles**–It's important for schools to create recurring formal situations in which teachers work together. Examples include team teaching and integrated lesson design. The team provides a lasting, substantial structure for sustained communication based in shared goals. As teachers work together, they develop a sense of community and a greater sense of effectiveness.

✓ **Communication Structures**–The development of a professional community requires structures and opportunities that encourage an exchange of ideas, both within and across such organizational units as teams, grade levels and subject departments. Regular meetings or an electronic mail system, for example, can provide a network for the exchange of ideas on instruction, curriculum, assessment and other professional issues.

✓ **Teacher Empowerment and School Autonomy**–Strong professional communities show high levels of teacher autonomy. Researchers suggest that teachers with more discretion to make decisions regarding their work feel more responsible for how well their students learn. The flexibility allows them to respond to the specific needs they see. Instead of being guided by rules, they are guided by the norms and beliefs of the professional community.

SOCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The social and human resources that enhance professional community include:

✓ **Openness to Improvement**–There must be support within the school for teachers who want to take risks and try new techniques and ideas. Otherwise, serious and lasting change cannot be sustained. Teachers must feel they are supported in their efforts to learn more about their profession and to make decisions based on that new knowledge.

✓ **Trust and Respect**–Teachers must feel they are honored for their expertise–within the school as well as within the district, the parent community and other significant groups. Respect, trust and a shared sense of loyalty build professional commitment and the cooperation required for collaboration and shared decision making.

✓ **Cognitive and Skill Base**–Professional community must be based on effective teaching, which in turn must be based on an expertise in the knowledge and skills of teaching. Structures such as peer counseling, along with help from external sources, can spread that expertise among faculty members, and can thereby help marginal or ineffective teachers improve.

✓ **Supportive Leadership**–Whether a school is led by a principal or a site-based team, that leadership must be a prime "keeper" of the school's vision. Leadership needs to keep the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement and collaboration.

Communications from the school's leadership will set the tone for the school. For example, if a principal contacts the faculty only on matters of organizational procedure, teachers will see these as the school's major concern and may give less attention to teaching and learning.

✓ **Socialization**–As schools recruit and socialize new teachers, there must be a

There should be almost daily opportunities for discussion among small groups with common interests, such as academic departments or grade levels, as well as regular meetings among the entire faculty.

mechanism for passing along the school's vision to the newcomers. Staff must impart a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful collective. School culture must encourage some behaviors and discourage others, in a daily process aimed at working toward the school mission.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

To identify conditions and factors that have the most effect on the development of professional community, we have examined teacher surveys in 15 restructuring schools studied by the Center. It's impossible to draw hard conclusions from such a small sample, but the surveys point to some interesting implications.

For example, elementary schools in this sample have a stronger sense of professional community than secondary schools do, particularly high schools. However, some high schools that have worked hard on the development of interdisciplinary teams, a "common language" of reform and other innovations showed levels of professional community that were equal to some of the elementary and middle schools in the study.

Still, we observe that reform tends to move more slowly at higher grade levels, because those schools–which generally offer more diverse curriculum to a more diverse student body than schools at lower grade levels–face greater challenges. Secondary schools, particularly high schools, must work hard to forge bonds between different departments and specializations if they are to move toward meaningful school-wide goals.

In the 15 restructuring schools studied thus far, however, school size does not appear to be a significant factor in the level of professional community observed. In this sample, the findings did not support the common belief that larger schools inevitably spawn subcultures that threaten strong school-wide community.

This doesn't mean that school size isn't a powerful factor in many schools, especially those which aren't undergoing restructuring. But it does suggest that problems created by a school's size can be overcome. Specific efforts and supportive leadership can, for example, create cohesive patterns of interaction among faculty members in large schools.

Gender composition also appears significant. Schools with a higher percentage of women on the faculty tend to develop a stronger sense of professional community. Other research indicates that when women constitute a large majority, organizational culture is affected. Women tend to pay more attention to interpersonal relations than men typically do, and they are more likely to cooperate and encourage the development of community.

STRUCTURE OR HUMAN RESOURCES: WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT?

Our research suggests that human resources–such as openness to improvement, trust and respect, teachers having knowledge and skills, supportive leadership and socialization–are more critical to the development of professional community than structural conditions.

Structural conditions–including time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures and teacher empowerment–are important, to be sure. But if a school lacks the social and human resources to make use of those structural conditions, it's unlikely that a strong professional community can develop.

This finding adds weight to the argument that the structural elements of restructuring have received too much emphasis in many reform proposals, while the need to improve the culture, climate and interpersonal relationships in schools have received too little attention.

This points to a missing element in the movement toward system-wide education reform and increased professionalization of teaching: the development of schools as healthy, professionally sustaining environments in which teachers are encouraged to do their best.

Professional community within schools has been a minor theme in many educational reform efforts since the 1960s. Perhaps it is time that it become a major rallying cry among reformers, rather than a secondary whisper.

Sharon Kruse is completing her doctorate in educational policy and administration at the University of Minnesota. She works on longitudinal case studies of school restructuring and teacher's work for the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Karen Seashore Louis chairs the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota. She is the principal investigator for the professional life of teachers division of the Center's school restructuring study.

Anthony Bryk is a professor of education at the University of Chicago and director of its Center for School Improvement. He is the principal investigator for the Center's research division on school governance, management and leadership. He also is engaged in a diverse array of projects on Chicago's school reform, including urban school restructuring, leadership development and system-level evaluation and policy studies.

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY–
Three Case Studies

By Leon Lynn

In its nationwide study of school restructuring, the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools has observed strong professional communities on several campuses. Here are profiles of professional community at three schools we feel have made exceptional progress on this issue: one elementary school, one middle school and one high school.

The observations are drawn from reports filed by teams of Center researchers that spent 29 or 30 person-days at each school conducting observations, surveys and interviews. The reports are not available to the public, but general findings from the database will be presented in future publications by Center staff.

The names of these schools have been changed to protect the confidentiality of students, staff, parents and others involved.

NAME: Southern Elementary School

LOCATION: Working-class neighborhood in a large Southern city.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 988 in prekindergarten through 5th grade.

STUDENT BODY: About 83 percent Hispanic, 12 percent white, 1 percent African American and 4 percent Asian. More than 90 percent are enrolled in federal programs that provide free or reduced-price meals to low-income children.

FACULTY: 75 full-time faculty members, including 18 who are state-certified in bilingual education.

SOUTHERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL– A Unifying Vision Bears Fruit

Thanks to a principal who united her faculty behind a vision of radical restructuring, Southern Elementary School has made real progress in student achievement– and the development of its professional community.

The school continues to face challenges, but staff members are hopeful that their strong professional community will help them stay on the right track.

In any given year, up to 80 percent of new students who arrive at Southern speak Spanish as their first–or only–language. The high percentage of children from low-income families, and low scores on standardized tests before serious reform efforts began, led to Southern's designation as a Chapter 1 school, which means all students are eligible to receive Chapter 1 services.

Southern's school district ordered the creation of school-based "improvement teams" in 1986. Each school was told to assemble a team of teachers, administrators and parents to develop a plan for boosting student performance. But by 1988, test scores at Southern still lagged behind the scores posted by other schools in the district. That was the year a new principal was assigned to the school. Her mission, in her own words, was to "fix the problem and get Southern up to speed."

There is evidence to suggest she succeeded. In 1988, Southern's average 5th-grade SRA score showed students performing at the 4th-grade, 3rd-month level. By 1991 the average was 5th-grade, 8th-month. Southern had met the goal of getting students to perform at grade level by the time they left 5th grade.

The new principal was a strong believer in making schools into nurturing, inclusive places. Teachers work best, she believed, when they feel they have control over how they do their jobs. At the same time, she believed that teachers needed to be supported by the administration as they sought out new ideas and techniques and tried them in the classroom.

When researchers from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools visited Southern during the 1991-92 school year, they found an active, apparently thriving professional community. According to the Center's survey:

✓ 89 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I have influence on the decisions in the school which directly affect me." Less than 2 percent disagreed.

✓ 82 percent of teachers disagreed strongly with the statement, "Many of the students are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them."

✓ More than 75 percent disagreed

Southern's principal decided that improving student performance would require nothing less than "a paradigm shift," a major restructuring of the values and practices that shaped the school and its culture.

with the statement, "The attitudes and habits my students bring to my class greatly reduce their chances for academic success."

✓ At least 90 percent of the teachers said they felt supported by the administration and felt safe to voice concerns. They said they were respected by their colleagues and could count on them.

✓ Nearly 75 percent of the teachers said staff development programs helped them acquire important new knowledge and skills.

Many teachers spoke of their loyalty to Southern. "I live far away from here and could more easily teach somewhere else," said one. "But I know that if I leave I would forfeit this very supportive, human and competent group of people with whom I work."

Back in 1988, as she sized up the challenge that she faced, Southern's principal decided that improving student performance would require nothing less than "a paradigm shift," a major restructuring of the values and practices that shaped the school and its culture.

After doing some research on different modes of restructuring, she embraced the Accelerated Schools model developed by Henry Levin of Stanford University. It calls on educators to adopt bold and inventive strategies for reaching so-called "at-risk" students. For example, the model says that students should be placed in their age-appropriate grade levels, as opposed to remedial classes, and should be expected to do the work they are assigned. All students, regardless of social background, should be expected to achieve at that level.

The Accelerated Schools model hinges on the development of a unity of purpose among a school's staff members, as well as the existence of a school-site decision mechanism that gives teachers a lot of control over how they do their jobs. In this way, Southern's principal explained, "values, practices and beliefs bubble up from the bottom, rather than (being) imposed from up above."

The openness of Southern's staff members, and their willingness to talk to each other, probably supported the development of such a strong community. Beyond that, it's difficult to say whether the school culture promoted restructuring, or if restructuring further reinforced the school's positive culture.

What is clear, though, is that Southern's faculty adapted quickly to the new direction charted by the new principal, who provided teachers with information about the Accelerated Schools concept and conducted a two-day staff training on the subject. Since the district hadn't given the school enough money for school-wide staff development that year, half the teachers took part in the training at any given time, while the other half covered classes.

In addition to inspiring teachers and providing them with technical information, the principal helped the staff take control of how they do their jobs. For example, she organized weekly faculty meetings at which teachers were called upon to redefine the school's mission and methods. In interviews with researchers from the Center, faculty members mentioned these meetings as a critical step in the school's restructuring process.

Under the school's formal governance structure, teachers retain a large degree of control. A steering committee composed of eight teachers and the principal discusses and decides many school issues. The "faculty as a whole" is the final authority on virtually all school-wide decisions.

HELPING TEACHERS WORK TOGETHER

Southern's school district has a formal policy of site-based decision making, and has further supported change at Southern by helping the school to win waivers from some state requirements. This support–and a level of non-interference with the school that many teachers noted with appreciation–has helped teachers try out new ideas and techniques and reflect on current practices. "We don't fear experimentation," the principal said. "We welcome it. Whatever works, do it, and share the experience."

Some examples of staff-led innovations are:

✓ Teachers are encouraged to form teams. They decide for themselves who should be on each team, and why, and then a master schedule is devised to meet those requests–giving team members the same period for planning time, for example–as nearly as possible.

There is no pressure put on teachers to team, though clearly those who want to try it are supported by the school's administration. During the 1991-92 school year there were 29 teachers organized on nine teams, which ranged from 2 to 12 members.

Teams have formed at Southern for many different reasons. Sometimes teachers came together because they shared common interests and challenges. Other teams have formed among teachers who perceived their different strengths as complementary to each other. Others wanted to share ideas and integrate instruction, while still others teamed up because they wanted to teach students from widely differing backgrounds.

Each team is unique in its practice. One paired a bilingual kindergarten class and an ESL kindergarten class for the entire day, with the two teachers teaching all subject areas together except for reading. Another two-member team, trying to maximize their perceived strengths, assigned one teacher to teach social studies to two classes, while the other taught science to both groups.

Another team included 12 teachers, two from each grade level. They matched themes and units and provided opportunities for cross-grade tutoring.

✓ Some teachers "graduate" to the next grade along with their students. On one team, two 3rd-grade teachers and two 4th-grade teachers agreed to move to the next grade level at the end of the school year, so they could continue working with the same students. Two 5th-grade teachers, meanwhile, agreed to go back to 3rd grade to start the cycle again. These six teachers used a shared planning period to trade insights on curriculum and instruction at the different grade levels. The common planning period also gave them an opportunity to offer each other emotional support.

Teachers reported that this "continuum of learning" structure gave them more flexibility in meeting student needs. For example, one teacher reported that she emphasized reading skills with her students in 3rd grade, and waited to concentrate on social studies until 5th grade, after they had developed stronger reading skills. The continuum also helped students and teachers form deeper bonds, providing students with greater support and teachers with greater insight into each student's strengths and needs.

✓ Classes are heterogeneously grouped. A single class can include students with varying levels of English and academic success, as well as special-education students. As part of this process, most of the school's special-education students have been mainstreamed, with most special-education teachers moving with them into mainstream classrooms to assist. This process took place during a two-year period, with the consent of the teachers.

REFLECTION AND INQUIRY

At the heart of Southern's push for innovation is an ongoing process of reflection and disciplined inquiry. This is nurtured through formal channels, such as committee meetings and in-service opportunities, and also flourishes in informal settings, such as the teacher's lounge. According to Center researchers, even Friday-night gatherings by some teachers at a local bar were dominated by substantive discussions about curriculum and instruction.

"We don't fear experimentation," the principal at Southern said. "We welcome it. Whatever works, do it, and share the experience."

The teachers' discussions seemed well-informed and based on research into specific practices, not simply one teacher's feeling about what might work. Teachers reported seeking out information on new techniques from professional journals, and school-district experts on various topics were invited to address staff meetings. This knowledge formed the basis for rigorous real-world examination.

One teacher described how the faculty approached portfolio assessment: "When we started ... we went through a whole lot of stuff with (the district resource person) and with some other people about what it would look like, and smell like, and walk like, and how you would know it when you saw it. And then we got into the business of criteria and standards. And so, then we separated into grade levels, and we spent a couple of those (planning) periods coming up with criteria that we felt ... were important. And we tend to do an awful lot of that.... Here's theory, now break up and apply it. Make it work. See if it's going to work. And then we get back together again, and everybody feeds in."

Southern's physical layout helps nurture this process. In addition to traditional four-walled, self-contained classrooms, the school also has two large open areas where classes can meet. These areas are divided into individual teaching spaces by temporary partitions of bulletin boards and bookcases. Teachers move freely through their colleagues' teaching space, and Center researchers noted a constant dialogue about instruction-related issues in these areas.

The teachers' ongoing dialogue over the "teacher continuum" idea further illustrated this process of reflection. Support for the new practice developed, but some teachers raised serious questions about it. They worried, for example, that continuums would lead to less heterogenous grouping in classes, because students who transfer into the school in mid-year–frequently immigrants, transients and students who have failed in other schools–would not be placed in existing continuums.

Others said they felt students would be better served by exposure to a wider variety of teachers, who would in turn expose the students to a wider variety of strengths and techniques. And others expressed concern because teachers in a continuum had to go through a whole new set of preparations for each year.

Teachers felt free to criticize the continuum idea, even though much of the staff supported it. The critics felt no fear of reprisals or other negative consequences. They knew the school leaders supported the right of teachers to openly disagree with the majority. The debate centered on ideas, without degenerating into criticisms of individuals.

COMMITMENT TO STUDENT LEARNING

The atmosphere at Southern was collegial, but far from pressure-free. "The pressure in such a school is to be a very good, competent and professional teacher," one faculty member said. "And if you are not doing your part, that is, self-monitoring your successes and failures, then that's a problem and everyone is going to notice."

At Southern, the pressure to excel comes largely from the teachers themselves, the principal claimed. "Teachers have become their own instructional leaders and are accountable to them-

selves and to their colleagues," she said.

When the school introduced new curriculum in math and language arts, teachers devoted many extra hours to planning. And teachers taking part in the teaching continuums–apparently driven by school values and peer expectations, as opposed to formal rules–spent many extra hours preparing lessons and materials. All reports indicated that teachers gave this extra time willingly and enthusiastically.

The staff's devotion to this philosophy helped teachers overcome structural impediments, such as a shortage of planning and staff-development time during the school day. Staff development often took place during after-school staff meetings, which usually lasted two hours or more. Teachers chose topics and then drew on each other for expertise, or called in experts from the district to lead the meetings. The principal supported this process by eliminating routine administrative matters from these staff meetings, using memos to deliver the typical announcements and directives instead.

Teachers used these meetings to study critical issues of curriculum and instruction, such as miscue analysis, the use of portfolios as assessment tools and the guided-inquiry method as a problem-solving technique. Researchers from the Center saw ample evidence that teachers were using this information when they taught and made decisions. These topics also were frequently the subjects of informal conversations among teachers.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Southern's commitment to developing a strong professional community seems to make a difference for students. Teachers, for the most part, displayed a high level of authentic instruction. They employed open-ended questions and cooperative groups. Researchers reported hearing students take part in substantive conversations in classes, and saw numerous examples of students critically evaluating complex ideas.

Since researchers visited Southern in the 1991-92 school year, the school has undergone some big changes. For one, new state rules have mandated a larger role for parents in the running of the school. It was too soon to tell that impact that would have, however.

The school also is contending with the departure of the principal who played such a key role in the school's restructuring. A new principal had just come on board when Center researchers visited the campus in 1991-92. Some teachers worried that the change in principals would cause once-committed teachers to burn out.

But the former principal, now an education consultant with a private firm, was optimistic. "Restructuring as a process is self-perpetuating, assuming that teachers own the values, beliefs and practices that underlie the teaching," she said. "And they do!"

The new principal acknowledged that he had much to learn about the way Southern is run. Staff members were hopeful he would adapt to the school's strong professional community.

NAME: Northwest Middle School

LOCATION: Mid-sized city in the Northwest.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 800 in grades 6 through 8.

STUDENT BODY: About 90 percent white, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 percent African American, 2 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Native American/Alaskan Native.

FACULTY: 45 full-time faculty members.

Teachers at Northwest can design any class they want to teach, and thereby are encouraged to "teach to their passion."

NORTHWEST MIDDLE SCHOOL– The Power of Choice

Northwest Middle School's commitment to autonomy–for both teachers and students–has helped nurture some aspects of professional community. But at the same time, that autonomy also has limited the community's development in some ways. Here we examine some of the pluses and minuses that have developed from the school's particular vision, structure and resources.

Northwest has a relatively long history as a restructured school. In the early 1970s, its staff adopted a remarkable "all-elective" structure. Students were free to choose any class offered at the school, and teachers were free to design and teach classes they wanted to teach.

This legacy of restructuring has been supplemented by a wave of newer reforms that began in 1988, with the arrival of a new principal who guided important changes in the school's class schedule and governance, among other areas.

But it is the "choice system" that continues to define Northwest's culture. Researchers from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools reported that teachers were universally committed to the concept. Many teachers pointed to "choice" as a widely held value which shaped virtually all decisions made at the school.

Under the system, students must consult advisors and their parents when choosing classes, and must come to a consensus with them about what to take. And they must take a "full load," meaning they have no unscheduled class periods, during each of the three terms in the school year. All 6th-graders must take a yearlong class in reading, writing and social studies. This class also covers study strategy, library research methods and other skills, to help students make the jump from elementary school to middle school.

But with few exceptions, students are free to choose any class offered at Northwest, without having to worry about staying in their grade level or accumulating a required number of credits in a particular subject area. "You teach kids to learn how to learn... and you can do that with any sort of curriculum," said the school's principal.

Teachers can design any class they want to teach, and thereby are encouraged to "teach to their passion." There are some controls on this process. For one, the staff as a whole must approve each teacher's proposed class offerings. Staffers weigh the merits of each individual proposal, as well as addressing the larger question of whether the school's offerings are "balanced." Also, because students are free to choose their classes, teachers must offer classes that students want to take. Teachers can be reassigned to different subject areas if their classes don't attract enough students.

Even with these controls, though, teachers still enjoy a great deal of freedom. In interviews with Center researchers, teachers often said this autonomy was central to helping them teach to the best of their abilities.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Teachers are encouraged to team up to offer "Connections" classes, which focus on language arts along with at least one other subject area, such as computer education, social studies or science. All students must register for a Connections class each term.

Northwest's steering committee relies heavily on staff advice when considering decisions, giving the staff even more input to the process than the governance structure formally dictates.

School officials say the organization of teacher teams is supposed to encourage collaboration, a sense of community and an "ethos of caring" among teachers. And indeed, every teacher interviewed by researchers from the Center said they had experienced meaningful collaboration while working on Connections classes.

Most teams include two teachers, though some are larger. Each team gets $1,000 in staff development money to spend as team members see fit. Teachers enjoy wide latitude: One team developed curriculum on "weekend retreats" while savoring fancy dinners. The principal didn't object. "The outcomes were great," he said. "It doesn't matter how you get there."

Since 1990, Northwest also has followed an innovative schedule. Most classes meet three times a week instead of five, usually on Monday for 37 minutes and then for 70-minute periods on two other days (Connections classes, however, meet every day).

At first, teachers were very dissatisfied with the new schedule. Many wanted to meet with their students every day. Others objected because the scheduling change meant that classes would be larger–the average class at Northwest rose to between 30 and 35 students, from an average of 25 to 30.

But from 1990 to 1993, teacher support for the new schedule grew, until they almost all supported it. They said the longer 70-minute classes gave them more time to reach students and complete more complex assignments during class, such as projects and labs. The schedule also gave each teacher a 70-minute planning period each day. Many teachers said this time was very important to them, and provided a structured time for joint planning among teachers who worked together in Connections classes.

ADVISING AND GOVERNING

In addition to their teaching duties, each faculty member serves as a student advisor. The school breaks up the student body into smaller multi-grade "houses," usually numbering 22 students, and the students in each house stay with the same advisor throughout their three years at Northwest. Each house meets three times a week. The advisor is considered the adult who is primarily responsible for the student's success at the school.

Advisors visit the homes of all incoming 6th-graders, they help their students pick classes, and they handle all but the most serious disciplinary problems that come up. The school's administrators exercise little formal supervision over this process. "It's basically a matter of trust," said the assistant principal. Students can be reassigned to another house if the administration sees problems developing between a teacher and student, but this only happens about once or twice per year.

All of the teachers interviewed by Center researchers emphasized that advisors get to know students, and care about them, by staying with them for three years.

Teachers at Northwest are called upon to play a big role in school governance. A steering committee–composed of eight teachers elected by their peers, two parents, two students, one classified employee and the principal–makes decisions about budget, allocation of staff, calendar and general school policies. The committee usually tries to make decisions by con-

Teachers are so free to design their own classes that they haven't tried to articulate criteria for instruction or student outcomes toward which all teachers strive.

sensus, but if this isn't possible, a two-thirds vote is needed to take action.

The staff as a whole, which meets regularly in "town meeting" fashion, can overrule the steering committee on any issue except staffing and allocation of money, again relying on a two-thirds majority if a consensus can't be reached.

Center researchers say the steering committee relies heavily on staff advice when considering decisions, giving the staff even more input to the process than the governance structure formally dictates.

Technically, the principal has veto power, but must declare an intention to use it before the meeting at which the decision will be discussed. The principal in charge during visits by Center researchers, clearly a believer in staff empowerment, had never issued a veto during his five years at Northwest.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Northwest's principal repeatedly demonstrated a true commitment to letting teachers make decisions for themselves, as opposed to pushing an agenda of his own. Even before he arrived at the school in April of 1988, he worked with faculty members for several months to begin planning for restructuring, and to make sure teachers played a central role in that process.

Once on the job, the principal began recruiting teachers to serve on a committee to draft a new mission statement for the school. As word of the committee spread, more teachers became involved. Eventually it included 25 members.

In 1989 this committee presented a "vision statement" to the full staff. It says, among other things, that Northwest should strive to be "a safe place to take risks," and "a place where those affected by a decision will be involved in the decision making process."

Under this principal's leadership, Northwest adopted several other practices which also support the development of a stronger professional community. For example, in 1990 the principal offered teachers the option of having their evaluations conducted through a "peer counseling" process instead of direct observation by the principal. Under this system, two teachers agree to observe each other three times during the year. They share feedback and meet with the principal to discuss these observations. All but one teacher at Northwest chose this option.

In 1991, Northwest also offered teachers the option of being evaluated by students. Teachers are responsible for devising a survey, collecting responses from students and making reports to the principal. All but two teachers chose this evaluation method.

The principal said he intentionally made teachers responsible for gathering and reporting student evaluations. "I trust them," he said. "We have good people giving each other feedback and kids giving you feedback. We have people who are going to listen to that...."

The principal also organized one or two staff retreats each year. The retreats centered on such topics as goal setting, restructuring, team building and multicultural issues. Teachers were not paid to attend, but they were provided with free room and board. The principal said he managed to find sponsors and money sources to cover costs, sometimes dipping into his own pocket to help make ends meet. About two-thirds of the staff had attended these retreats.

Northwest also has enjoyed a good measure of support from outside agencies, such as its school district and the state. The school district, which is committed to site-based decision making, hasn't tried to stop the school from giving teachers and students so much freedom. The district has also provided the school with money for staff development–that amounted to $4,000 in one recent year–and individual teachers can earn $1,000 annually for working on team projects with other teachers. When the school decided to spend $18,000 in campus funds to provide each teacher with an office phone and voice mail, and the system ended up costing $27,000, the district paid the difference. The principal saw this as district support for innovation.

Northwest also has enjoyed strong support from the state, including $40,000 in staff development grants each year for four consecutive years. School district officials said this record of winning state grants was unmatched, and they attributed the school's success to its unique curriculum and decision making processes.

Many staffers also attributed the state's lack of interference to the fact that standardized test scores at Northwest were high.

SOME PROBLEMS

While Northwest's commitment to teacher autonomy has helped the development of professional community in some ways, it has actually hindered that community's development in others.

Teachers are so free to design their own classes that they haven't tried to articulate criteria for instruction or student outcomes toward which all teachers strive. "For example, my daughter doesn't know the times tables," said one parent, who is a recognized expert on educational policy and management. "I don't mind that she doesn't know it. What bothers me is that nobody here knows that she doesn't know it. There's no standard that gives the content knowledge and the intellectual processes that children need to know."

When asked if the faculty has a shared sense of purpose, most teachers

offered only vague answers. They talked about "moving forward" or having "the same end result in mind," but they didn't specify what those goals were. They also displayed widely differing perceptions of their colleagues. Estimates varied on how many teachers didn't buy into restructuring, from those who said three or four to those who said half the staff didn't participate.

There is reflective dialogue taking place at Northwest, according to researchers from the Center. But it takes place in isolated pockets, such as teaching teams. Some teachers said they share ideas with colleagues "all the time," while others reported very little communication. One teacher said the choice system promotes teacher "separateness," because teachers feel they must keep their classes different in order to compete for students.

Center researchers found no systematic way for staff members to share knowledge to affect instruction school-wide, or even within content areas. Several teachers spoke of returning from professional conferences with exciting new ideas, only to find they had no way to share what they had learned with their colleagues. There was no evidence that this new information translated into changed instructional practice on a broader scale.

As a result, teachers developed very divergent ideas about curriculum and instruction. One teacher was highly critical of cooperative learning, saying it did a disservice to brighter students because the class spent so much time getting other students to figure things out. Another teacher, meanwhile, strongly supported cooperative learning, saying it helped students learn to work with others.

The school's experience with a "curriculum committee" illustrates how the commitment to teacher autonomy can complicate school-wide curriculum reform, and how much the decision making process depends on faculty consensus. At the end of the 1990-91 school year, the staff voted to form a curriculum committee, because an evaluation of the school's program raised some major concerns about curriculum that staff members didn't feel prepared to address.

Researchers from the Center found high levels of authentic instruction taking place at Northwest. Perhaps, they suggested, teachers push themselves to serve students because they feel such a high level of ownership of the school.

The principal reportedly encountered little success in getting people to volunteer for the committee–a common problem in a school where teachers already felt heavily burdened by teaching, advising and taking part in the governance process. So the principal ended up asking a few people he thought would be interested.

The committee–two parents, two students and six teachers, as well as the principal–began meeting in October 1991, and conducted a full year of research into authentic assessment, integrated curriculum, multicultural education and thinking skills. But during this year, there was little communication between the committee and the staff as a whole.

Many teachers, unsure what the committee was doing or how it might affect them, became suspicious. According to one committee member, staffers feared "we were once again being hurled headlong into radical change that people were just unwilling to accept, and they didn't think that change was necessarily coming from the majority of the staff, but rather from a handpicked group of rabble rousers."

At a staff meeting in November 1992, the committee tried to present its findings, without any intention of making any recommendations for action. But committee members never got the chance. Instead, a teacher derailed the process by saying the staff should list and commend good things in the existing curriculum before trying to make any changes. The momentum of the meeting shifted and the committee's work was never reported. As a result, the committee disbanded without accomplishing anything. Teachers said this incident left some staff members feeling betrayed and deeply wounded.

A SOLID TRACK RECORD

Despite these problems, Northwest is by all accounts a successful school with a strong professional community. The principal, relying on student transcripts, said there was ample evidence that Northwest students did well once they reached high school. Standardized test scores also suggested no deficiencies in critical skills among Northwest students, despite the lack of formal curriculum requirements.

Researchers from the Center found high levels of authentic instruction taking place at Northwest. Perhaps, they suggested, teachers push themselves to serve students because they feel such a high level of ownership of the school.

Teachers consistently reported that they exercised real power, individually and collectively, in decision making. And many teachers said they felt the greatest pressure to ensure the success of students–by providing true opportunities to learn–came from within their own ranks.

At the beginning of the 1993-94 school year, Northwest's principal left the school. Some observers attributed his departure to bad feelings over the curriculum committee fiasco. Staff members and Center researchers alike wondered how the principal's departure would affect the school.

NAME: Western High School

LOCATION: Mid-sized city in the West, the center of a fast-growing metropolitan area of more than 1.3 million people.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: More than 2,300 in grades 9 through 12.

STUDENT BODY: About 36 percent white, 24 percent Asian, 17 percent African American, 12 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Filipino, 1 percent Native American. Students include native speakers of more than 23 languages. Almost 20 percent are designated as limited in English proficiency. About 25 percent come from homes that receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

FACULTY: 130 full-time faculty members.

Western's successes, and other elements of its program that have been somewhat less successful, illustrate many of the challenges in building a professional community in hundreds of comprehensive high schools across the United States.

WESTERN HIGH SCHOOL– Meeting the Challenge of Diversity

Western High School was designed to break the mold.

Five years before the school opened its doors in 1989–before the campus had even been built–the school district appointed a principal to oversee the development of a new and different type of high-school program.

The program and structure that emerged from that process put a high value on "teacher professionalism," and included several mechanisms designed to empower teachers and to encourage them to work together.

As Western has set about trying to meet the needs of its unusually diverse student population, its efforts to build a professional community have met with some success. Those successes, and other elements of Western's program that have been somewhat less successful, illustrate many of the challenges in building a professional community in hundreds of comprehensive high schools across the United States.

Western's founding principal, after receiving 18 months of paid leave to "just learn," as he put it, convened a planning committee of teachers, students and parents in 1987 to help write a mission statement for the school and help shape its formal structure. The school design developed through this process differs from a typical high school in several ways.

For one, there is a stated, schoolwide commitment to heterogenous grouping and multicultural education. During the 1992-93 school year, when researchers from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools visited the campus, Western offered only two or three honors-level classes, instead of the array of upper-level classes that high schools typically offer their college-bound students. Instead, Western provided a college-preparatory program for all students, including mandatory algebra, geometry and biology courses. According to the school's mission statement, high expectations are intended to produce high student outcomes.

About 20 percent of Western's students during the 1992-93 school year were enrolled in "house programs," in which a small number of students–usually 150 or less–were taught by a common set of up to eight teachers. This helps "personalize instruction" and keeps students from feeling lost "in the mad scramble of six classes and 2,500 kids," the principal explained. School officials said students in the houses seemed to perform better and post better attendance rates.

Different houses had different themes. One group of 120 students, led by four teachers, focused on business technology, especially job-related computer skills. These teachers received an extra preparation period every day to meet and talk about curriculum and discuss the progress and needs of students in their house. Other houses, which operated in a similar manner, included a fine-arts program, one that focused on technology and media, and a "school-within-a-school" for students considered high dropout risks.

Within the house structure, teachers found new opportunities to meet with their colleagues and compare points of view. They also said the house structure helped them to develop deeper and more meaningful connections with students.

SELECTING A COMMITTED STAFF

Most teachers at Western were handpicked by the school's planning committee. Some were recruited from other schools within Western's district, while others were brought in from outside.

Committee members tried to choose teachers who expressed strong support for the school's commitment to a heterogenous, multicultural learning environment. Several committee members told Center researchers that they bypassed some

good teachers who didn't seem receptive to those ideas.

As a result of this selection process, Center researchers found Western's staff deeply committed to the school's central focus on multicultural and heterogenous education. They also were unusually active in developing curriculum, participating in committees and working on in-house staff development. The staff also had a larger percentage of teachers who considered themselves innovators or deeply committed to a cause. In interviews, teachers frequently commented on the high energy level that pervaded the school.

COLLABORATION

Western makes use of several formal mechanisms that encourage teacher collaboration. Newer teachers, for example, are paired with more experienced "mentor" teachers, who provide guidance and feedback on a regular basis. Also, some teachers from different disciplines, such as social studies and English, are paired off into teams. The members of these teams are expected to communicate regularly. They get two days off per year to coordinate curriculum between disciplines. Several teachers said these pairings gave them valuable contact with other teachers.

Collaboration also occurs through an array of formal committees, which make decisions about aspects of teaching and governance. Some committees work on specific topics, such as employing the Effective Schools model on campus. Other, less formal groups come together as interested teachers decide to promote a particular idea or agenda. One group, for example, worked with faculty from a state university on the development of a new math curriculum.

Western conducts four half-day training sessions each year, focusing on subjects that the staff, principal and staff development committee decide are most important. Some staff members, thanks to outside funding sources, also have attended training sessions and seminars throughout the United States and in Canada. Overall, researchers from the Center found that most teachers at Western were pleased with the professional growth opportunities they had.

Teachers at Western often felt they simply didn't have time to engage in reflective dialogue because they were busy preparing for classes, teaching those classes and attending meetings.

GOVERNANCE

Western's governance structure was designed to promote shared decision making and give teachers a significant measure of control over school affairs. The school's central governing body, the Planning/ Restructuring Committee– which approves all policies and practices that affect the learning environment–includes six certified staff members among its 13 members (the other slots are held by three administrators, two parents, one student and one classified staff member). The committee makes decisions by consensus.

Teachers also are invited to serve on a wide variety of other committees, which meet after school to oversee the school's physical environment, curriculum and instruction, parent involvement and other important concerns. Anyone may attend any committee meeting and take part in the decision making process. These committees operate by consensus as well.

The school is also made up of academic "divisions," each of which includes two or more of the typical high school departments. These divisions– such as culture and literature, or math, science and technology–are supposed to encourage the development of integrated curriculum. Many decisions about curriculum are made at the divisional level. Teachers are required to attend monthly division meetings.

SUPPORT

Western has attracted a great deal of support from outside agencies, which provide funding and other support to encourage teachers to examine their craft and try new methods and ideas. For example, a private foundation has contributed $69,000 for additional substitute teachers during the past three years, so that teachers would have more access to release time for planning and developing materials.

"We were shocked," one staff member said. "Because we've always felt that that was important, but we've also had the feeling that people wouldn't understand if we asked for more time for ourselves. And here was an organization that was saying to us, 'We have money and we want to give you the money so that you can be a real person, so that you're not going to burn out. Use this money wisely and you will feel like a professional.' "

Staff members have brought back ideas from seminars and other externally funded training opportunities, helping to keep school practices grounded in the best professional knowledge.

While district rules put some constraints on Western's program– by mandating certain reading lists at certain grade levels, for example– the district generally has allowed the school to continue its stated mission to "break the mold." The district also has provided numerous training opportunities for Western teachers.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Western has mechanisms for empowering teachers and for encouraging them to develop a professional community. But in some areas, the quest for a strong profes-

continued on back cover

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The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools will study how organizational features of schools can be changed to increase the intellectual and social competence of students. The five-year program of research focuses on restructuring in four areas: the experiences of students in school; the professional life of teachers; the governance, management and leadership of schools; and the coordination of community resources to better serve educationally disadvantaged students.

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Director: Fred M. Newmann

Associate Director: Gary Wehlage

Dissemination Coordinator: Leon Lynn

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continued from page 15

sional community continues.

For example, while some teachers lauded the amount of control over governance the school's structure gave them, many others said didn't they have adequate time to take part in all the committee meetings and governance activities available to them. They felt they were too busy trying to meet the needs of the school's diverse student population. Activities that didn't relate directly to the development of curriculum or instruction, or other strategies for engaging students, had to play a lesser role, they said.

Also, many committee meetings followed a rigid format, in which each issue was allotted only a certain number of minutes, which some teachers say discouraged meaningful debate.

When reflective dialogue occurred at Western, it flourished mostly in isolated groups of 10 people or less. Center researchers attributed this to several causes. For one, the school's sprawling multi-acre campus includes few common areas where teachers can conveniently meet and talk. And teachers often felt they simply didn't have time to engage in reflective dialogue because they were busy preparing for classes, teaching those classes and attending meetings. This may explain why the school's motto, "Making Success an Everyday Experience," was widely known among teachers, but standards for student success could vary considerably among teachers and classes.

Center researchers found several teachers who claimed to be moving away from conventional instruction and toward innovative strategies for reaching students, who nevertheless seemed to be relying on traditional teaching practices. Perhaps a more robust reflective dialogue would have helped these teachers base their practices in truly innovative strategies. Also, some of these teachers reported that their colleagues were taking steps away from traditional instruction, but they also conceded that they hadn't done much peer observation.

Different groups at Western worked on projects with very different goals. For example, one group was preparing plans to push for an increasingly vocational form of education, while another was making plans to push for a stronger emphasis on academics. These two groups hadn't met, in part because the format for school meetings wouldn't really allow for a vigorous discussion of alternative educational missions.

Western continues to grow rapidly–since the 1992-93 school year, its student population has risen from 2,141 to 2,320. This influx of students, and the great diversity of their social and ethnic backgrounds, will continue to challenge the school's efforts to build a professional community.

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School-wide Professional Community

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